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10/05

saving money
on **prescription**
drugs

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saving money on prescription drugs

There are a number of programs that provide prescription drugs to seniors at a discount. These programs are provided by federal and state agencies, drug companies and some private organizations. They are directed primarily at those who can't afford prescription drugs at retail prices.

While lawmakers continue to work to make prescription drugs more affordable for Californians, there are steps you can take now to lower your costs. Some discounts come directly from manufacturers; others cover a broader range of medicines, including over-the-counter items (like aspirin or cough syrup). Certain discount programs come with enrollment fees, some require membership cards, while others offer savings to anyone with a Medicare card.

Understanding these programs and their different eligibility requirements and application procedures can be difficult and confusing. The information in this pamphlet can help determine which programs you might be eligible for, answer basic questions about prescription drugs and provide additional resources.

drugs at reduced rates. Eligibility is based on service time and income status. Priority levels determine whether co-payments are required. Prescription drugs are prescribed by VA healthcare providers and are dispensed by VA pharmacies or mailed directly to the veteran. Widows and dependent children of veterans may also be eligible for prescription drug reimbursements.

For more information, contact any VA health care facility or the VA Health Benefits Service Center at (877) 222-8387 or visit www.va.gov/health_benefits

special groups

For those who are members or employees of special groups, such as the Federal Government or CalPers, contact your employer for more information on prescription drug coverage.

notes

the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy at (847) 391-4406, or at www.nabp.net.

- DO use only websites that contain a privacy policy explaining what kind of information they ask for and how they use it and allow consumers to review the privacy policy.
- DO look for displayed seals that show websites are “verified internet pharmacy practice sites” that meet state and federal requirements.
- DO use only websites that have a licensed pharmacist available to answer your questions.
- DON'T buy from websites that offer to prescribe a medicine for the first time without a physical exam by your doctor or that sell prescription medicines without a prescription.



Know all the facts before buying online. Visit www.fda.gov and click on “Buying Medicines Online” or call (888) 463-6332.

veterans

In 1996, Congress passed the Veterans' Health Care Eligibility Reform Act, which created a comprehensive health benefits package for all veterans. Veterans must be enrolled in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care system in order to receive benefits, including prescription

There is also a list of dos and don'ts for buying drugs on the Internet. New discount programs become available often, so check with your health plan, pharmacy and senior membership programs for updated information.

for those on medicare

Medicare is the federal program that provides health insurance for people who are at least 65 years old and for younger people with certain disabilities or diseases.



Drug Discount Cards

If you are covered by Medicare, you can purchase a drug discount card from sponsoring drug companies for up to \$30 per year. You pay a lower price for prescription drugs listed on the card. Some may qualify for a \$600 subsidy to help pay for prescriptions with their card. Eligibility is based on income and whether there is other coverage in effect. Before purchasing a card, check to make sure your pharmacy will accept it. Drug discount cards are available only until December 31, 2005.

If you receive Medi-Cal, you cannot obtain a drug discount card unless you are paying a share for Medi-Cal costs.



Medicare Part D

Congress recently passed legislation establishing a new Medicare prescription drug benefit plan entitled Medicare Part D. Effective January 1, 2006,

the plan provides outpatient prescription drug coverage and is expected to save Medicare recipients on their prescription drug needs. It is voluntary and, as with other insurance plans, a monthly premium is charged, as well as a co-payment for each filled prescription. More information will be made available in Fall 2005; current Medicare recipients will receive a handbook detailing the new plan.

For more information, call Medicare at (800) 633-4227 or visit www.medicare.gov. CalMedicare.org also provides information on Medicare in California. Medicare prices for the 200 most-requested brand name drugs can be found at www.medi-cal.ca.gov/sb393inq.asp.

Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage

Medicare will pay for some outpatient prescription drugs. These include several oral cancer and anti-nausea drugs,

generic drugs

A generic drug is a copy of a brand-name drug that has the same strength, quality and performance, but is less expensive. All FDA-approved generic drugs must meet the same rigid standards as brand-name drugs.

*More information on generic drugs can be found at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration website:
www.fda.gov/cder/ogd*

online pharmacies

Buying prescriptions through online pharmacies may offer cost savings, but there are questionable sites that make buying online risky. Potential risks include unapproved or outdated drugs, little or no quality control, and confidentiality and security issues. Here are some dos and don'ts if you choose to purchase drugs online:



- DO make sure that the website represents a licensed pharmacy in good standing. Check with the California Board of Pharmacy at (916) 445-5014, or at www.pharmacy.ca.gov, or with

- **NeedyMeds, Inc.**

www.needymeds.com

provides information on over 250 patient-assistance programs.

- **Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America**

www.helpingpatients.org

provides extensive information on patient-assistance programs and federal and state-sponsored programs.



- **The Medicine Program**

www.themedicineprogram.com

aids patients who may qualify for patient-assistance programs at a cost of \$5 per drug.

- **Medicine for People in Need (Medpin)** www.medpin.org/freedrugs/pap_links.html offered by the Public Health Institute, provides links to information about patient-assistance programs.

- **Rx Help for Californians**

www.rxhelpforca.org

is a web-based clearinghouse of private patient assistance programs.

certain drugs for transplant patients and most injectable drugs. You must be enrolled in Medicare Part B (the part of Medicare that covers doctors' services and outpatient hospital care). After paying a deductible, you pay only 20% of the Medicare-approved amount for covered prescription drugs.

Medigap Plans H, I and J

(Medicare Supplemental Insurance)

Many Medicare recipients buy "Medigap" plans from health-insurance companies to pay for gaps in Medicare coverage, including costs of prescription drugs. There are currently 10 standardized Medigap plans, A through J. Plans H and I pay for half of prescription drug costs, up to \$1,250 per year (after a \$250 yearly deductible). Plan J pays half the costs, up to \$3,000 per year (after a \$500 yearly deductible).

To qualify for these Medigap plans, you must be enrolled in Medicare Part A and B. Premiums range from \$1,150 to more than \$11,000 annually. Prices vary considerably, so be sure to compare costs between insurance companies. After January 1, 2006, there will be a change in Medigap policies that cover prescription drugs. Plans H, I, and J may still be sold, but without the prescription drug benefits.

For information on Medigap insurance, visit www.insurance.ca.gov/SAB/Surveys.htm and click on Medicare Supplement

Insurance. You can also find Medigap insurers by zip code and price range at www.medicare.gov/Choices/Overview.asp.

Medicare Advantage Plan

Another avenue for drug coverage for Medicare recipients is to enroll in a Medicare Advantage Plan. This is the new name for Part C, Medicare + Choice, which has been updated to offer more health plan options. To join, you must already be enrolled in Medicare Part A and B. With this new plan, you will not need a Medigap policy, as it covers many of the same benefits that a Medigap plan would. Keep in mind that the Medicare health plan that you choose will affect many things, including cost, benefits, doctor choice, convenience and quality.

Low-income Seniors

The National Council on Aging, through a program called BenefitsCheckUp, offers a free Internet database that screens low-income seniors who might be eligible for assistance. The program helps seniors determine if they are eligible for the Medicaid program that pays for prescription drugs, as well as other benefits such as SSI, food stamps, veteran's assistance and long-term care.

For more information, visit www.benefitscheckup.org. The website provides application forms, address locations and additional information.

drug companies

Most drug manufacturers provide a number of free or discounted prescription drugs for people who can't afford to buy them at retail prices. To be eligible, you must not receive any other drug coverage. Rules vary by company and are based on income.

If eligible, you would apply directly to the manufacturer to receive a drug that has been prescribed by your physician. The manufacturer might send the drug directly to you or to your doctor. Typically, a free supply of drugs would be provided for a limited period; another application would then have to be submitted. There are various patient-assistance programs that provide information on how to qualify and apply:

- **Health Insurance Counseling and Advocacy Program (HICAP)**

www.aging.ca.gov/html/programs/hicap.html (800) 434-0222 helps patients determine if they qualify for free prescription drugs and assists with applications. Volunteers provide **free** counseling on public and private health insurance programs.

- **Volunteers in Health Care**

www.rxassist.org provides information on patient-assistance programs by company, brand name, generic name and drug class.

